



Leadership & action amid change — 2018 highlights



“While the year saw the first test of the Council’s regulatory role, it also opened the door for a less fractious and more collaborative approach to achieving the coequal goals. In 2018 the Council recommended ways to improve how water is stored, moved, and diverted from the Delta, took action to reduce flood risk and increase accountability for State spending, and, together with State and federal partners, solicited proposals for \$12 million in critical scientific research.”

– Susan Tatayon, Council Chair



The Delta Stewardship Council (Council) was established to be an independent voice for science and policy in the Delta, with a primary mission to further the State’s [coequal goals](#): improving water supply reliability and restoring the Delta’s ecosystem, while protecting the Delta’s unique and evolving character. The Council’s chief tool, the [Delta Plan](#), is a legally enforceable long-term management plan for the Delta and the Suisun Marsh, first adopted in 2013.

In 2018, the seven-member Council continued to examine critical issues regarding the Delta Plan at its monthly public meetings, providing leadership and attention on areas in need of additional work by highlighting progress and recommending future actions; guided by the best available science. Council meetings are webcast and meeting materials are archived and made available online to provide in-depth background information about water resources, risk reduction, ecosystem restoration, and the “Delta as place” issues over the past eight years.

The Council’s visibility was heightened this year as it approved new amendments to Delta Plan policies, recommendations, and performance measures while ensuring significant Delta projects were consistent with the Delta Plan. Thousands participated in these processes, watching closely as the sum of the Council’s actions reach beyond the immediate Delta region, creating lasting Statewide impacts for millions of Californians.

Special rules for a special place

Covered actions – The Council works to achieve the coequal goals through a formal [covered action](#) consistency review process, as well as monthly public Council meetings to ensure actions are consistent with the Delta Plan's [14 regulations](#) and 87 recommendations. Moreover, Council collaboration with local, State, and federal agencies, Delta residents, and non-governmental organizations ensure that actions and plans are consistent with the Delta Plan's regulations and recommendations.

Early consultation – The Council provides assistance applying the Delta Plan's regulatory policies through "early consultation." Through this process, Council staff meets with project proponents to discuss relevant Delta Plan policies, provide advice on the use of best available science for adaptive management, and answer questions about consistency certification requirements.

The Council received the highest number of certifications to date (10), with nine projects going through early consultation in 2018. The Council received its first appeals to covered actions this year (10 appeals spanning two projects), testing its appellant authority for the first time. Additionally, the Council provided 27 formal comment letters intended to ensure that projects that may potentially be covered actions are nonetheless aware of the Delta Plan's requirements and how they could further the coequal goals.



Council leadership through coordination

Climate adaptation – In the time since the Delta Plan was adopted in 2013, research on climate change has advanced and its significant implications for the region are becoming better understood.

In June, the Council launched a three-year project to identify future impacts of climate change and sea level rise on the Delta, work not before done in the area. The assessment will improve understanding of climate change risks and potential adaptation strategies, including specific Delta Plan policies, recommendations, and performance measures.

Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC) – The [DPIIC](#) serves as a forum to discuss, consider, and orchestrate timely and coordinated agency efforts to implement the Delta Plan.

2018 brought the addition of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, a recognition of critically important connections between the Bay and the Delta. The DPIIC continued to shine a light on Delta science governance via exploratory panel discussions and the creation of the Delta Science Funding Initiative Workgroup. The DPIIC also formed a high-level interagency workgroup to direct more resources to the ongoing nutria eradication efforts.

Jan



Conclusion of Delta monitoring seminar series

Feb



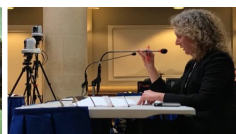
Ecosystem amendment open house

Mar



Salmon disease ecology workshop

Apr



9th DPIIC meeting

May



Regional San upgrade workshop

Jun



Data to decision-making summer series

Long-range management of the Delta through amendments to the Delta Plan

Public outreach, spanning years and various draft documents, culminated in the Council's adoption of three major amendments to the Delta Plan in April. The amendments resulted from promises made in the original plan: to update interim priorities for State funding for Delta levees, refine performance measures to show progress in implementing the Delta Plan, and update recommendations for conveyance, storage and operations of water projects in the absence of the Bay-Delta

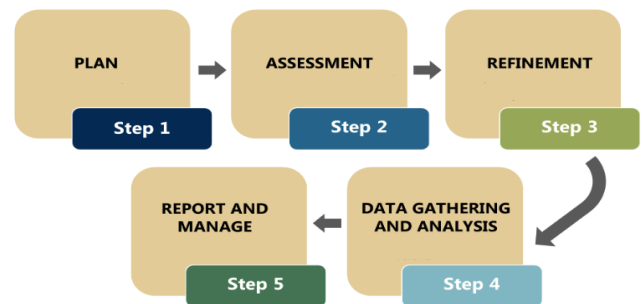
Delta Levees Investment Strategy (DLIS) – The [DLIS](#) is a multi-year project to update the Delta Plan's 2013 interim priorities for flood risk reduction. The DLIS guides the prioritization of discretionary State investments in the Delta that reduce risk and was developed with substantial input from other State agencies, Delta interests, and stakeholders. The DLIS regulatory component is anticipated to be completed in 2019.









Conveyance, storage, and operations (CSO) – This amendment includes a series of recommendations that fulfill the Council's statutory requirements to promote options for water CSO. While not promoting any specific projects, it provides guiding recommendations, including the following:

- Evaluating, designing, and implementing new or improved conveyance or diversion facilities in the Delta
- Improving or modifying the existing conveyance facilities
- Implementing new and/or expanded conveyance facilities
- Implementing new and/or expanded surface water and groundwater storage
- Improving water operations monitoring, data management, and data transparency
- Operating the system using adaptive management

Performance measures – In addition to 117 administrative measures, the Delta Plan's [performance measures](#) include 38 output and outcome measures. The measures were refined based on stakeholder and independent scientific reviews, and aim to translate programmatic objectives into measurable indicators of progress. They are a vital part of the Council's adaptive management approach and provide decision-useful information on the status and trends towards the coequal goals.



Delta ecosystem – The Council is currently considering an amendment to its ecosystem chapter of the Delta Plan that sets targets, policies, recommendations, and performance measures to advance restoration and recovery of the Delta ecosystem. It is being informed by past and future effects of climate change and sea level rise, as well as by best available science, in the form of three synthesis papers, workshops, and more. The amendment focuses on prioritizing the desired outcomes for healthy Delta ecosystem recovery and application of adaptive management to improve the likelihood of success.

Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
					
Final review of ecosystem amendment synthesis papers	Delta science joint proposal application webinar	10th Biennial Bay-Delta Science Conference	CA WaterFix appeals hearing	10th DPIIC meeting + CA WaterFix workshop	Delta ISB ecosystem workshop

Using best available science to support and inform decision-making

How to protect the independence of scientific inquiry, how to ensure that research is both useable and useful to policymakers, and how decisions can better match the accelerating pace of environmental change are questions that have been a central theme at the Council and the Delta Science Program for several years. Examples of how the Council developed and applied the use of best available science are as follows:



10th Biennial Bay-Delta Science Conference – Regularly attended by just over 1,000, the conference is a forum for the Delta science and management communities to present recent findings to a broad audience of researchers, managers, decision makers, and stakeholders. This year marked the tenth biennial conference, “Our Estuary at an Intersection,” focusing on how the Bay-Delta ecosystem sits at the crossroads of ecology, economy, and society. The conference is one of the best opportunities for the regional science and management communities to share and understand how to apply recent science, build relationships, and enhance communications skills.

“The biennial Bay-Delta Science Conference continues to compare favorably to major national and international conferences in scientific quality.” – Delta Independent Science Board



Delta science joint proposal solicitation – As part of its mission to fund science, the Delta Science Program, together with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, released a unique, collaborative solicitation in fall of 2018 to fund scientific studies in the Delta. The joint-agency partnership will initially fund up to \$12 million for scientific research. The research will help fill in knowledge gaps identified in the Council's [2017-2021 Science Action Agenda](#) and meet the objectives of voter-approved Proposition 1 (Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014).

The September solicitation brought in 62 proposals, requesting \$43.5 million, to be scored by an interagency team of scientists and an independent scientific panel before the Council approves funding for the selected studies in early 2019.



Delta Science Plan five-year review & update – The Delta Science Plan is a shared guidance document intended to strengthen, organize, and communicate science to provide relevant and credible support for policy and management actions. This year, the Delta Science Program conducted a five-year review and update of the [Delta Science Plan](#) by working with collaborative Delta science groups and directly with the public at workshops. The updated plan will be released in 2019.



Delta Independent Science Board (ISB) – In 2018, the Delta ISB continued to work on its self-initiated thematic reviews on Delta monitoring and water quality. They developed prospectuses that described the scope of its reviews on the science used to estimate water supply reliability, the roles and impacts of non-native species in the Delta, and the governance structure of the Interagency Ecological Program. By the summer of 2018, the Delta ISB completed its multi-year review on water quality (chemical contaminants and nutrients) in the Delta. Upon completion, findings and recommendations from this review were presented to the Council and other venues.

In addition to its thematic reviews, the Delta ISB also took on requests from the Delta community including three synthesis papers for the Council's Ecosystem Amendment and the Delta Science Program's updated Delta Science Plan.